

9. THE ROOSTING HABITS OF GREEN BEE-EATER, *MEROPS ORIENTALIS ORIENTALIS* LATHAM

Green bee-eater, a little insectivorous bird is found all over the open cultivated plains in India, except in Eastern Assam (Sálim Ali & Ripley 1970).<sup>1</sup> This bird is seen throughout the year in Poona, roosting communally on different green foliage trees. Fourteen such roosting sites were observed in and around Poona. One particular roosting site was selected for intensive observations on pre-roosting and post-roosting behaviour, timing, display flights, population counts and feeding habits.

These birds arrive in pairs or small heterogeneous flocks at the roosting place; their time of arrival is normally associated with sunset. Those birds which reach before sunset show pre-roosting behaviour around the roosting place. For instance some birds from pre-roosting perches make flights high into the sky in groups calling and then suddenly all return to the perches. The birds arriving after sunset go directly to the roost. The time of arrival of the birds is early during cloudy days than on clear days. The time taken for assemblage during cloudy days is also more (30-45 minutes) than on clear days (15-20 minutes). At roosting time a typical high pitched warning signal is given by the birds in case of danger from intruders (Black Drongo, Cuckoo, Crows or birds of prey) when all the birds fly off and return to the roost only when they are sure that the intruder has left the site. In a few in-

stances the birds were seen in large numbers to chase away the intruder. Sometimes when the roost is disturbed, some birds of the main roost form another roost and in the morning they rejoin the original roost. The roosting site is shifted if repeated disturbance occurs, and in due course they return if the disturbances stop. The birds do not favour mixed roosting with any other bird.

In the morning about 30 minutes before sunrise, the birds start dispersing from the roost and leave in batches of 5-30 birds. On cloudy, rainy or winter mornings the dispersal is delayed. The number of roosting birds vary, in general it increases towards the winter.

The food of the birds consists of fast flying insects, caught by darting after the prey. The prey is either battered against the perch or crushed in the beaks moving the head in circular fashion and swallowed. Feeding activity is less during noon time when they rest on trees. Towards evening the feeding increases till the bird goes to the roost. They normally feed in an area about 2 km in radius of the roosting place. The Bee-eater is occasionally seen on the back of buffaloes in the company of cattle egrets feeding on the insects around. However, if a Black Drongo happens to be around it chases away the smaller bee-eater.

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D. B. BASTAWDE

<sup>1</sup> SALIM ALI, & RIPLEY, S. DILLON (1970): Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan, Vol. 4. Oxford University Press, Bombay.